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SUBJECT: ISRAEL MEDIA REACTION

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SUBJECTS COVERED IN THIS REPORT:  
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Mideast

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Key stories in the media:  
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Israel Radio quoted PA Chairman [President] Mahmoud Abbas as saying Monday that Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice will visit the PA on Friday as part of her Mideast tour. On Sunday, The Jerusalem Post said that her visit is meant to ensure that Arab countries do not provide financial aid to the Hamas-led PA and to strengthen the international front against Hamas. On Monday, Ha'aretz reported that A/S David Welch will visit Israel and the PA over the weekend. The newspaper said that the U.S. would try to strengthen Abbas as he deals with Hamas. On Monday, Maariv reported that Shin Bet Director Yuval Diskin was about to leave for the U.S. in order to coordinate efforts to isolate Hamas and to discuss the Hamas-Iran connection.

Leading media reported that Abbas has formally charged Hamas leader Mahmoud Haniyeh to form the new Palestinian government. Major media reported that Hamas and Fatah might create a national unity government. Leading media reported that the PFLP has agreed to join the Hamas government. Some media reported that the PFLP has received assurances that its imprisoned militants, including the murderers of Israeli cabinet minister Rehavam Zeevi, would be freed. Major media quoted Defense Minister Shaul Mofaz as saying that Israel would respond harshly to this. The Jerusalem Post quoted PA officials as saying Monday that Abbas is planning to appoint new security chiefs in a bid to maintain control over the PA security forces after Hamas forms the new cabinet. Ha'aretz reported that Israel continues to coordinate security forces with the PA, as IDF officers and their counterparts in the Palestinian security services are maintaining ties as per usual. On Monday, Ha'aretz led with the request Abbas made of Hamas during Saturday's swearing-in session of the parliament that it honor agreements made with Israel.

During the weekend, all media reported that on Sunday, the Israel cabinet approved a series of sanctions that would be taken against the PA after the new Palestinian parliament was sworn in on Saturday, giving Hamas a majority in the Palestinian legislature. The central sanction is a decision to withhold the Palestinian tax funds that Israel levies for the PA -- funds that are used generally to cover the PA civil service payroll. The cabinet, however, voted down a proposal that was put forward by the security establishment to close the Erez crossing and to terminate immediately the employment of Gazan laborers in Israel.

Leading media quoted Hamas's deputy political bureau head Musa Abu Marzouk as saying in an interview with the Israeli-Palestinian radio Kol Hashalom that Israel's existence is a fact.

All media reported on, and Yediot and Maariv led with, the visit of a Hamas delegation led by political bureau head Khaled Mashal to Iran. Maariv bannered: "A Hate Alliance." Iranian Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei called on Muslim nations to provide annual financial aid to a Hamas-led PA government and supported Hamas's refusal to recognize Israel. Ha'aretz reported that Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak declined to meet with Hamas representatives. Leading media cited the London-based Al-Hayat that Jordan canceled a visit of Hamas's leaders to Amman.

On Monday, The Jerusalem Post reported that American officials have been quietly probing whether Georgia would be willing to allow the U.S. to use its military bases and airfields in the event of a military conflict with Tehran.

All media cited an announcement by the Shin Bet and IDF Monday that plans by a Fatah-Tanzim cell in Bethlehem to fire mortars into Jerusalem's Gilo neighborhood have been thwarted. The Jerusalem Post quoted members of the Knesset's Foreign Affairs and Defense Committee as saying that plans to attack neighborhoods in central Jerusalem were also discovered.

All media reported that the IDF has conducted an operation in Nablus in the past few days. An Islamic Jihad militant was killed Monday in the city's refugee camp of Balata. The media reported that four Palestinians were killed in clashes with the IDF on Sunday.

Italian PM Silvio Berlusconi was quoted as saying in an interview with Maariv that he wishes for Kadima's victory in the elections.

All media highlighted the sentencing of British holocaust denier David Irving to three years' imprisonment.

Ha'aretz reported that last week a federal court ordered a lower court to review the case of an American child whose passport indicates his place of birth as "Jerusalem," as his parents want "Israel" to appear instead.

On Monday, Yediot reported that on Sunday, 300 Israeli and Palestinian high-school students took part in a diplomatic simulation game. The newspaper wrote that U.S. Ambassador to Israel Richard Jones attended the opening ceremony.

Ha'aretz cited the results of a poll conducted among Palestinians by the Jerusalem Media and Communication Center, according to which 66 percent of respondents said the new government should honor the PA's commitment to negotiations with Israel. Among Hamas voters, only 12 percent said they chose Hamas for its political agenda, while 43 percent said they were fed up with Fatah's corruption. The rest said they were hoping for a better life or voted for religious reasons. Mahmoud Abbas's popularity continued to decline.

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Mideast:  
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Summary:

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Senior columnist Nahum Barnea wrote on page one of mass-circulation, pluralist Yediot Aharonot: "Olmert is determined to continue to restrain himself, despite the fact that it is not certain that he can allow himself to do so."

Independent, left-leaning Ha'aretz editorialized: "It is not realistic to think about separating Hamas rule from the Palestinian people."

The conservative, independent Jerusalem Post editorialized: "The international community, often with Israel's participation, has a long history of financially supporting the Palestinian national project almost regardless of the form it takes."

Columnist Amos Gilboa wrote in popular, pluralist Maariv: "[In the past, Hamas] had no interest in becoming an Iranian protectorate. Now ... I don't think ... a strategic alliance will be forged between them."

Block Quotes:

#### I. "Ehud's Piping Hot Bowl of Soup"

Senior columnist Nahum Barnea wrote on page one of mass-circulation, pluralist *Yediot Aharonot* (February 20): "This is the first diplomatic crisis that Olmert has encountered as prime minister. Unfortunately, it is taking place in the midst of an election campaign. Olmert is trying to deal with the [Hamas-related] crisis in the most sober way possible, according to his perspective. The U.S. administration believed that Israel should have refrained, at the present stage, from taking any action against the Palestinian Authority. The argument was that as long as a Hamas government has not been formed, there was no pretext for severing relations with the PA. Olmert believed differently: as soon as the parliament has been sworn in, power has been handed over in the PA.... Olmert's bigger problem is on the internal Israeli front. He refuses to send a message to the public that the rise of Hamas is a national disaster.... According to the stormy reaction of the Hamas leaders to Israel's decisions, Olmert presumes that at least in the territories they have produced the necessary impression. Olmert is not Sharon. He does not have a reserve of decades of fighting the Palestinians at his disposal. Sharon could allow himself to show restraint where necessary. Olmert is determined to continue to restrain himself, despite the fact that it is not certain that he can allow himself to do so."

#### II. "Diet Instead of Wisdom"

Independent, left-leaning *Ha'aretz* editorialized (February 20): "It is not realistic to think about separating Hamas rule from the Palestinian people, or about starving government institutions while sending humanitarian assistance directly to the population. The Palestinians chose their leadership democratically, and any such separation is arrogant and has no chance. The unsuccessful comments by Dov Weisglass -- whose position and source of authority in the present government is difficult to understand -- regarding the need to put the Palestinian nation on a diet, but not to starve it, symbolizes more than anything the humiliating way in which Israel relates to the Palestinians, which was one of the factors in Hamas's rise to power. It is unnecessary and degrading to recommend a diet to a hungry and unemployed nation, in addition to which Israel is still responsible for preventing hunger in all parts of the West Bank that it controls as an occupying power. At this stage Hamas is acting more responsibly than the Israeli government. Its representatives speak of a new era, of a transition from terror to politics, of continued opposition to occupation via other means, and of aspirations to a long-term *hudna* (cease-fire)."

#### III. "Stop Aiding Hamas"

The conservative, independent *Jerusalem Post* editorialized (February 21): "In its January 30 statement, the Quartet linked its continued funding of the PA to a Palestinian leadership 'commitment to the principles of nonviolence, recognition of Israel, and acceptance of previous agreements and obligations, including the road map'.... The trouble is that the international community, often with Israel's participation, has a long history of financially supporting the Palestinian national project almost regardless of the form it takes, the goals it endorses, and the means it chooses. Why should Hamas believe things have changed? This is not a question of timing but of substance. It is a question of whether Palestinian statehood is, as President George W. Bush declared in June 2002, conditional on the Palestinians choosing to create a lawful, peaceful democracy rather than an aggressive terrorist state. The Palestinian people, it is widely argued despite the landslide electoral support for Hamas, wants the former. If so, the international community will be betraying that Palestinian people, not to mention Israel and its own interests, if it does not hold the PA leadership to the full requirements of democracy and peace."

#### IV. "Iran Is Not Here"

Columnist Amos Gilboa wrote in popular, pluralist *Maariv* (February 20): "The main reason for the low Iranian aid [to Hamas in the past] was the relationship between the two, which was never characterized by strategic relations, but rather by suspicion and maintaining a distance. First, because Hamas

maintained its independence and its agenda was utterly different than that of Iran's. It also had no interest in becoming an Iranian protectorate. Now, ostensibly, the potential has been created for a change in the relationship, but I don't think this is to the extent that a strategic alliance will be forged between them. Hamas will have a definite interest in maintaining its ties with the Arab states, headed by Saudi Arabia and the Gulf emirates, which will continue to help it unless it becomes an Iranian satellite. Secondly, Hamas belongs to the Sunni stream of Islam, whereas the Iranians are Shiites. There is a difference in principle between Hamas and Hizbullah, which is Shiite and recognizes the supreme authority of the top Iranian religious leader, and whose leaders trained in Iran. Moreover, Iran is known to be quite stingy when it comes to handing out money."

JONES